

an outstanding Asian. His performance in each straw poll by the UN Security Council, ranking no lower than second, closely behind Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Minister of Foreign Affairs & Trade of the Republic of Korea, demonstrated the strength of his candidature. The Government decided to voluntarily withdraw his candidature in consideration of its consistent view that the next Secretary General should be an Asian with the widest possible acceptability and to help generate a consensus on the selection of an Asian.

Talks on joint anti-terror mechanism

***34. SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:
SHRI YASHWANT SINHA:**

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Prime Minister and Pakistan's President met in Havana and reached an agreement to have a joint anti-terror mechanism and resumption of their secretary-level talks which were on hold after the Mumbai blasts in July;

(b) if so, whether modalities for joint anti-terror mechanism have been worked out;

(c) if so, the details thereof;

(d) whether secretary-level talks have also been resumed; and

(e) if so, the outcome of the talks held?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) The Prime Minister of India and President Musharraf met in Havana on 17 September 2006 in the margins of the NAM Summit. They strongly condemned all acts of terrorism and agreed that terrorism is scourge that needs to be effectively dealt with. They decided to put in place an India-Pakistan anti-terrorism institutional mechanism. They also directed their Foreign Secretaries to resume the Composite Dialogue. In pursuance of this directive, the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan met in New Delhi on 14-15 November 2006. They agreed to set up a 3-member anti-terror mechanism. The anti-terror mechanism will be headed by Additional Secretary (International Organisations) of the Ministry of

External Affairs of India and Additional Secretary (UN & EC) from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan. Its mandate would be to consider counter-terrorism measures, including through the regular and timely sharing of information. The mechanism is yet to meet.

The two Foreign Secretaries reviewed the progress made in the third round of the Composite Dialogue. A wide-range of bilateral issues under eight subjects have been under discussion since June 2004 within the ambit of the Composite Dialogue. On Sir Creek, the Foreign Secretaries agreed to hold a meeting of experts on 22-23 December 2006. The experts are expected to decide on the coordinates for a joint survey of the Sir Creek, while simultaneously conducting discussions on the maritime boundary. The issues of Siachen and Jammu & Kashmir have also been discussed and the two sides exchanged views with the objective of narrowing down divergences. It was agreed on humanitarian grounds, that all fishermen and prisoners of the other country whose national status stands confirmed and who have completed their sentences would be released by 25 December 2006.

During the Foreign Secretaries talks, an agreement on 'Reducing the Risk from Accidents relating to Nuclear Weapons' was initialed. The two countries agreed on the early signing of the revised Protocol on Shipping Services. The hotline between Indian Coast Guard and Pakistan Maritime Security Agency, which was signed and ratified earlier during the year, has been operationalized. The progress made towards the revision of the 1982 Protocol on Consular Access was reviewed. The Foreign Secretaries also agreed to examine the release of prisoners of the other country who are detained on minor charges. They agreed to promote friendly exchanges between the two countries and for an early finalization of an updated Visa Agreement. The list of shrines under the 1974 Bilateral Protocol on Visits to Religious Shrines will also be expanded. There was reiteration of the importance of enhancing mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Both sides also expressed keenness to reopen the respective Consulates General in Mumbai and Karachi quickly.